

Federal Communications Commission

Consumer Alert

Predictive Dialing: Silence on the Other End of the Line

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) receives many complaints about predictive dialing by telemarketers. Here's what happens: the phone rings and when the person receiving the call picks up the phone, he or she is met with silence or the "click" of the calling party disconnecting the call. This can be caused by predictive dialing, which is when a telemarketer's automatic dialer simultaneously dials many more numbers than the telemarketer can handle if all of the called parties pick up at the same time. The first to pick up is connected to the telemarketer while the rest are disconnected.

FCC rules require that companies identify themselves to consumers and also that telemarketers maintain "do-not-call" lists for people who do not wish to receive telemarketing calls from a certain company. The practice of predictive dialing, and the resulting abandoned calls, often do not allow consumers to identify the company calling and, therefore, do not afford consumers the opportunity to make a "do-not-call" request under FCC rules.

Consumers who wish to avoid all telemarketing calls may want to contact their state to find out if it has a broad "do-not-call" law that prohibits all telemarketing calls to individuals registered on its state list. Currently, Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, "do-not-call" lists. Other states are considering similar laws. Also, the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) maintains a "do-not-call" list that is used voluntarily by its 4,500 member companies. DMA can be reached at (212) 768-7277. Their address is:

Direct Marketing Association
Telephone Preference Service
Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

For more information on predictive dialing, contact your state utility commission or consumer protection agency.

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